



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF DISTINGUISHED PERSONS.

MEMOIR OF THE REV. GEORGE WALKER.

Continued from p. 283, No. XXVII.

IN the spring of 1754, he returned to his father's house, having finally left college. He was now a candidate at large for the ministerial office; but, as no situation immediately presented itself, he commenced his professional career by occasional assistance to the neighbouring ministers. It is probable, that his first sermon was preached at his native place, as his mother, who was a strict church-woman, sacrificed on this occasion her religious scruples to her desire of witnessing her son's initiatory address. If she decided however by this first exhibition, she would not have augured very favourably of his future success. A more trying situation can scarcely be imagined, than where a young man for the first time addresses an audience to whom he is personally known, and where he is conscious that the anxious fears of his friends, the expectations of his acquaintance, and the curiosity of all, are strongly excited. The fear of disappointing their hopes increases his diffidence, and induces a perturbation of mind, that debilitates his powers and enfeebles his delivery. Mr. Walker experienced this strongly in the present instance, as it occasioned such a depression of his voice, that he was sometimes scarcely audible.

In a letter to a quondam fellow student he has very forcibly expressed his sentiments.

"I doubt not you have heard of my having offered myself to the service of any presbyterian tribe, that wanted a spiritual consul; and as it becomes me to be diffident of my own abilities, I should be mighty glad of sharing the honour and burden with a colleague. But why should I talk of consul and colleague? When I think of the insurmountable difference between my own temper, manners, and sentiments, and the

BELFAST MAG. NO. XXVIII.

general character of the electors, I have little hopes of pleasing them in any station, unless I could play the Vicar of Bray, and cut my coat orthodox, or heterodox, talk sense or nonsense, as my interest dictates. I have heard accidentally of many objections since I commenced probationer."

His excessive application, which he still continued, and his sedentary life, were productive of their usual consequences, in inducing a series of complaints, that disqualified him altogether for pursuing his studies. In the beginning of this year he was seized with a succession of ague fits, attended with profuse perspirations, excessive faintness, violent headaches, and a loss of appetite, that amounted to an absolute loathing of food. He was attacked also with a violent inflammation in his eyes, occasioned by a too free use of them during candlelight; and his sufferings from this cause were so violent, as to occasion no little apprehension, that they would terminate in a total loss of sight. Sea-bathing and a suspension of all mental exertion were recommended by his physician. Accordingly in the beginning of autumn he undertook a journey to the coast. In this retirement he abandoned himself to those pleasing sensations, which the mind experiences in the relaxation from its severer labours, when secluded from the realities of life, the noise and interruption of the world, it sinks within itself, abandons itself to the train of its reveries, and indulges in all the luxury of fancy. In the following letter he has so beautifully described the pleasures flowing from this state of the mind, that we shall offer no apology for inserting it.

"I am later than my promise, nevertheless excuse me. My punctuality in letter-writing I hope will never be admitted as a test of my friendship; as I am sure to my own heart it is none of the real respect
X x

and love I bear to many, who have found me grossly deficient in the article of correspondence. Since I left Leeds, I have spent most of my time at the sea-side, much to my satisfaction, and I hope not less so to the benefit of my health. If my abilities corresponded with my inclinations, I should never be contented till I had procured a summer retreat on the coast, which would still be rendered more agreeable by its vicinity to a frequented harbour, which affords a variety of entertainment to a speculative mind, that possesses so much interest in humanity, as to partake in some measure of the feelings of the sea-faring man, whose very happiness flows with the tide or turns with the wind. I have wandered for hours amidst rocks and sands in a pleasing absence of thought and care, when a pebble or a shell has afforded me as much pleasure as a mathematical problem. At other times I would draw figures and diagrams on the sand, which the next wave effaced, when suddenly a view of some natural conveniency of situation would suggest the idea of a harbour, and by the magic aid of a certain powerful enchantress (high imagination) rocks were removed, piers were raised, channels were cut, and a port at once created, which the same omnipotent lady filled with those gallant wonders, that so astonished the Indians. These romantic chimæras would then be annihilated by some distant prospect at sea, which would raise a new train of imaginations, till the object that occasioned them vanished from my sight. I then walked idly sauntering along the shore, gazing with a placid delight on the vast ocean, and the endless uniformity of its motion, when some high-swelling wave, which overtopped the rest, and rolled on in state and majesty, till on a sudden it broke with a loud noise upon the shore, brought to my idea the picture of a proud overgrown mortal, that swells for a while above his fellows with all the insolence of pomp and imaginary greatness, only to make his fall the more conspicuous and violent. Weary at length with the tedious uniformity of such a sight, I would stoop to cockle-shells or

whatever attracted my curiosity, and would thus idly spend another hour till the whole enchantment of the day would be broken by an unmannerly knight, whose prowess none ever withstood (known to mankind by the name of hunger) whose command unable to resist, I left my paradise, like Adam, with weary steps and slow. Not however like him, never to return, for such was my daily occupation, when the weather permitted me, which was much finer than any we had had during the summer, as if it sympathized with the genius of the place, and complacently withheld every rude unmannerly blast, which might banish the graces that wanted around. David speaks of the sun rushing like a bridegroom from the chambers of the east, but the month that I spent here must certainly have been his honey moon, he wore so constant a face of joy, while all nature returned the smile; winter, which seemed already to have devoured its prey, was compelled to retreat with precipitation; summer and all its gay attendants were recalled, vegetables and animals rejoiced, pleasure danced around, and health,

The best lov'd gift of Heaven to human kind,
Came sweetly smiling on each breeze of wind,

"This was happiness too great, long to continue. Summer is gone at last, winter has fixed its hold, and all looks dreary and uncomfortable. Head-aches and agues stare me in the face. The noise of a town, and the confinements of a study, and the tedious round of weekly labours are returned. All my quondam friends are dispersed, and I feel half a stranger even in my native town.

In the course of this year he was chosen the minister of the congregation at Durham, where the memory of his uncle's former services would no doubt operate much in his favour, and introduce him to more than an ordinary share of the attention and friendship of his flock.

As he was now regularly established in the stated office of a minister, it was thought necessary, that he

should undergo the ceremony of ordination. This was accordingly performed at the meeting of ministers convened for the purpose in October 1737, a practice now very much disused among the rational dissenters, and which will probably in a little time be altogether laid aside. Having satisfactorily answered the questions proposed, he received ordination as a minister in the following terms:—“These are to certify, that the Rev. George Walker, having preached a sermon, and exhibited a Latin thesis from a subject assigned him, and publicly delivered a confession of his faith, was this day solemnly ordained, as witness our hands, &c.”

It is probable, that none of the ministers assembled contemplated this ceremony in any other light, than as a solemn approbation of the individual as fitted by his character, his talents, and his faith, for the exercise of that profession, to which he had devoted himself. The notion of their acting in any apostolic character, and communicating to him by some secret and supernatural interference certain peculiar powers, must have been discarded by all as a remnant of folly and superstition; nevertheless there were many among the dissenting laity, who retained so much of the old puritanical spirit, that they would have deemed the sacrament but imperfectly administered by any but a regularly ordained minister, and have regarded the act of baptism by any other as nugatory and inefficacious.

During his residence at Durham, his habits of life appear to have continued uniform, and his health to have materially suffered from his inordinate application to his studies. Under the signature of P.M.D.* he was at this time a frequent contributor to the *Ladies' Diary*, and solved therein many very abstruse questions, that attracted the notice of the mathematicians of the day. It was at this time also, that he finished his doctrines of the sphere, a work of which he had laid the foundation in very early life, having commenced it before he was eighteen. This was partly undertaken as an amusement, and part-

ly to remove from his mind the inaccuracies, obscurities and melegancies, which disgraced every system, that had as yet been published upon this department of the mathematics. The elements of the sphere, with the branches dependent thereon, had hitherto been but imperfectly attempted in a geometric style, or had been subjected to the slovenly hand of Algebra.

Shortly after his removal to Yarmouth from Durham he commenced his work on the conic-sections. The design of this undertaking suggested itself to him on reading the universal arithmetic of Sir Isaac Newton.

The same intemperate application to these and his other pursuits still characterized his habits of life; and a variety of consequent complaints compelled him to occasional intermission of his studies. It is probable, that from the commencement of his taste for mathematics may be dated that want of economy in the distribution of his time, which led him to appropriate to the persecution of his studies so many of those hours, that, with his infirm state of health, would have been more wisely given to sleep, and the restoration of exhausted nature. For months together has he retired to rest with the rising of the sun, and, till within a few years of his death, when his strength was not equal to such arduous exertions, it was his usual custom to prolong his studies to an advanced hour of the morning. He seems, at all times, to have considered his body as the mere slave to his mind, and to pay no other attention to it, than what its necessities absolutely required. Experience however sufficiently demonstrates the injudiciousness of such a system, and its tendency to defeat the very object, that it has in view. The powers of the mind require to be renewed by occasional interruptions of ease and relaxation; and all extraordinary efforts are calculated only to impair its vigour, and to induce a premature decay of its faculties. Though he was happily exempt from the misfortune of experiencing the latter effect, yet there is no doubt, but that his intemperance of application was attended with serious injury to his health and strength; and most of those bodily

* Presbyterian Minister, Durham.

complaints under which at various periods he suffered, were the result of his sedentary life. Yet we must not condemn this imprudence with too much severity, lest we include in our censure many of the wisest and the best of men, who have done honour to human nature. The mere man of the world, occupied in the common concern of business or amusement, may prescribe to himself such a stated regulation of his time, as is best adapted to the nature of his pursuits; nor is there any thing in them, that forbids a practical adherence to it, but the student, who is buried in the profound contemplations of his closet, is abstracted from the world and all its forms, he is not to be broken in upon by the ordinary calls of life; absorbed in his abstruse speculations, he is wholly inattentive to the lapse of time; nor does he cease from his intellectual exertions until the powers of his mind, exhausted by intense application, require to be invigorated, by an intermission of its labours. These observations apply with peculiar force to the mathematical student. When the truth to be evolved is dependent upon a long connected series of deduction, where in regular progression it is to be elicited step by step, any sudden diversion of the mind breaks at once the train of its ideas, and destroys the order of its reasonings.

At the close of the year 1771, shortly after his marriage which took place in this year he received an invitation from the society of the old meeting at Birmingham, to succeed their late minister, the Rev. Mr. Howell. Though nothing could exceed the cordiality that subsisted between himself and the congregation at Yarmouth, yet a regard to his situation as a married man induced him to accede to this proposal, which would the better enable him to provide for all the duties that might spring from so interesting a relation. In consequence of his acceptance of this situation, a house was provided for him, and every necessary preparation made for his reception. Previously however to his finally leaving Yarmouth for this purpose, he was applied to by

the trustees of the Warrington Academy, to undertake the office of mathematical professor in that institution; and as this was a situation for which he was eminently qualified by his talents and acquirements, as well as extremely coincident with his general habits and inclinations, he felt no other hesitation in immediately accepting it, than what arose from his recent engagement with Birmingham. In this dilemma he consulted his friend Dr. Priestly, through whom he had received the invitation to Warrington. The Doctor in his reply observed, that it would be much easier for the people of Birmingham to provide themselves with another minister, than the Academy with another tutor: that the duty which he had to perform in this case was so different from that of a minister, that it could not be considered as quitting one congregation for another; and that those whom he had consulted upon the business made light of his engagement with Birmingham. His friends in general pressed him to the same choice, apprehensive that his health and strength might prove unequal to the services of so large a congregation.

During his residence at Warrington he published his treatise upon the sphere, principally for the purpose of accommodating the students who attended his lectures. This is generally acknowledged to be the most masterly treatise upon the subject extant, and is remarkable for the purity of the language, and the elegance of the demonstrations.

But if there were no other merit to recommend it to the student, the construction of the solid figures wherever they are required must render it of superior utility. The time and labour employed in the contrivance and final preparation of these figures greatly exceeded that of the composition of the whole work besides. To furnish 500 copies to the public required the cutting out of more than 20,000 figures, which were afterwards to be divided, pierced, fitted, and the whole inserted in the planes to which they are adherent; an immense undertaking, and a species of mechanical employment peculiarly irksome to a

man of taste and genius. This production, the result of so much patient industry and laborious investigation, was sold to Mr. Johnson for the small sum of 40*l.* and even this was afterward voluntarily remitted by Mr. Walker, as the sale had not indemnified him for the expense of publication. That a work of such acknowledged merit should have met with so little countenance from the public, strongly argues the decline of mathematical learning, which is perhaps no very favourable symptom of the literary taste of the age.

Mr. Walker's determination to resign his office was no sooner known, than he was chosen as one of the ministers of the congregation assembling on the High-pavement, Nottingham. His removal thither, in consequence of his acceptance of this situation was in the autumn of 1774. This may be regarded as an important æra in his life, as from it may be dated his usefulness as a public character. He had very early been thrown into circumstances, that had contributed to give his mind a decided turn for public affairs. In the celebrated election for Durham in 1761, he had been induced, by motives of private friendship, to enter warmly into the contest; on which occasion his services had attracted particular notice, and were deemed very instrumental to the election of the successful candidate. During his stay also at Yarmouth, where he subsequently resided, the dissenters possessed a very considerable political influence, which was in general successfully exerted in the choice of a representative of similar views and principles with themselves. Scarcely therefore could he refrain from imbibing a portion of that spirit with which his friends and acquaintance in general were actuated. He had moreover, both as the effect of his education and of his own reading and reflection, formed very strong and decided notions upon the nature of civil and religious liberty; nor did he deem it inconsistent with his ministerial character, to act up to the spirit of the principles he had imbibed, whenever he conceived, that his public duty required it of him. Possessing such sentiments and a disposition naturally ardent, he entered

with more than ordinary zeal into the discussion of all those questions, that in their consequences affected the interests of the public? and, whether the subject had a reference merely to the local concerns of the town in which he resided, or embraced the more extended interests of the community at large, he generally acted a leading and conspicuous part. In this however there was no forward ostension of himself, no arrogant desire of dictating to a party, or of attracting the notice of the public, but it was the situation which his character and his merit naturally assigned him, and was on the part of his associates a voluntary deference to superior talents and acquirements.

The peculiar circumstances of the situation, in which he was now placed, rendered his exertions as a public character still more extensively useful. The municipal jurisdiction of the town was vested in a corporation, that acted upon the same liberal and enlarged principles, as Mr. Walker had himself adopted for the rule of his public conduct, while the magistracy in general were members of that religious community, to which he was minister. These circumstances contributed to give a weight to his opinions, which his personal character alone would scarcely have obtained; but being united to such other qualities, as generally give a man an ascendancy in society, they procured him a degree of influence, which few private individuals have ever possessed. These opportunities of public good the active benevolence of his disposition did not permit him to pass unimproved; but on every occasion, in which his services might be beneficially employed, he exerted himself with a zeal and disinterestedness, that were influenced neither by a desire of popularity, nor an apprehension of personal danger. His removal to Nottingham but barely preceded the commencement of American hostilities; and as he approved neither of the grounds on which they were undertaken, nor the subsequent policy of continuing them, he exerted himself with considerable activity in opposition to so ruinous a measure. For this purpose he did not merely

content himself with bearing his testimony against its injustice and impolicy as a single and unconnected individual; but, by promoting the plan of public petitions, he gave that form and body to the expression of the popular voice, in which alone it could operate with effect. And to the honour of Nottingham it may be recorded, that, in its endeavours for the preservation of peace, not only on this occasion but during the continuance of the late hostilities with France, she exhibited to the rest of the kingdom a singular example of political wisdom and of public spirit, which, had it more generally obtained, might have been the means of averting the calamities, that have marked the progress of those ill-fated wars. These petitions, or rather remonstrances, that at various times were presented to the different departments of government, were the productions of his pen, and are distinguished by his characteristic energy of sentiment and language.

In his ministerial character also Mr. Walker was led to advert to the circumstances of the times in three discourses, which, at the request of his hearers, were published in the years 1776, 1778, and 1784. The first and second of these were delivered on days appointed for a general fast; and the third on the day of thanksgiving on account of the reconciliation with America. Of the propriety of a compliance with these ordinances of government he entertained considerable doubts; and, as he has observed himself, he was induced to it more by the importunity of his best and severest friends, than any approval of his own conscience. In after life he formed more determined opinions upon the subject, nor could any persuasions have then induced him to have borne a part in such a solemn mockery of religion, such an unmeaning and hypocritical parade of humiliation and contrition, assumed at the mere bidding of authority, dictated by no feeling of a truly repentant spirit, which alone can sanctify the act, or render it an acceptable homage, and where, on the part of those who exact

this appearance of national sorrow, it is accompanied by a renunciation of no one public or private vice, or scarcely one act, that manifests a spirit according with the penitent language of their proclamation. But however little sincerity might generally enter into this religious act, or whatever doubts he might entertain respecting a compliance with it, the honesty of his own motives is apparent, in the spirit that pervades these discourses, which are characterized by such a zeal for reformation, public and private, such an indignant disdain of vice, exhibited with so much vigour of sentiment and energy of language, as entitle them to rank not only among the best of his own compositions, but with any of the most admired specimens of the hortatory eloquence of the pulpit.

The little success that had attended the progress of the American war, the increasing distresses of the times, the vast accumulation of the public debts, joined to the fear of those consequences that might arise to the parent state from the total separation of her colonies, had spread a universal gloom throughout the nation, and excited the most alarming apprehensions for the future. With this general sentiment Mr. Walker deeply sympathized; and in the present discourses he has in feeling terms lamented the degradation of his country; but when he indulges his despondency so far as to predict her approaching decline; and to declare, that he even then regarded her only in the light of the venerable dead, he may be thought to have carried his apprehensions farther, than the nature of the circumstances justified. The reasons on which he grounded this opinion, however, were not those, that are the most obvious to superficial observers. They were not the consequences of defeat, or a maleadministration of public affairs; for to these the energies of a virtuous people will always rise superior: but they were the well grounded apprehensions of one accustomed sedately to reflect upon the causes, that contribute to the rise and fall of nations; one who possessed an enlarged and comprehen-

sive knowledge of mankind, drawn from his own experience, and that of past ages, which taught him, that, as no state derived its greatness from fortuitous circumstances alone, so none ever fell from the rank it held but by the decline of that public spirit and virtue, to which it owed its elevation. This decline Mr. Walker saw, or thought he saw, in the general insensibility to national disgrace and humiliation; in the barefaced profligacy and dissipation of the great; in the open and avowed contempt for religion, and abandonment of all her precepts; in the prostitution of public character, which a Briton cannot contemplate without amazement, and which more than any thing indicates the decline of public virtue; in the increasing idleness and depravity of the lower ranks, who are the invigorating soul of a community, and who alone in the hour of danger can administer that support to a suffering country, which her exigencies may require. These symp-

toms, the history of every age and nation had taught him, were the sure forerunners of national decline. and whether he were justified in asserting, that his own country manifested these symptoms, must be determined by the character which she then exhibited, and has since continued to display. Yet, though he had no expectation of ever witnessing the revival of that ancient spirit, which had marked the better days of his country, this discouraging prospect did not sink him into that supine indifference, that molient despair, which the extinction of hope produces on the minds of those who are animated to exertion only by the prospect of success, and who act not from that steady adherence to principle, that conscientious discharge of duty, which are independent of circumstances, and which, aiming only at good designs, leaves the issue of events to the disposal of a wiser being.

To be Continued.

DETACHED ANECDOTES.

RAPID PROGRESS IN THE LANCASTRIAN
MODE OF TUITION, IN ONE INSTANCE,
ATTRIBUTED TO WITCHCRAFT.

IN Shropshire and Staffordshire, in the space of only eight months, a boy scarcely seventeen, has lately organized schools, and instructed school masters, for above one thousand children: the affectionate and mild, but firm conduct of this amiable lad, rendered each school a scene of pleasure and delight, in which his steady application of the system of order, proved its utility and excellence. When he took leave of one school, in order to open another at a different place, it was a most delightful sight to behold the whole school of children, lamenting his departure, as they would the loss of their nearest friend. He introduced the system so completely into one school, that the children required very little attention

to execute the plan, and thereby teach themselves. To a person not an eyewitness, it would scarcely seem credible, but it is a fact, that the master, who was a shoe maker, would sit at the head of the school with his last and leather, and attentively work and overlook the tuition of the school: he had no occasion to exert himself to prevent confusion, for the order of the system was so far introduced into the habits of the children, that they would themselves be the first to correct the smallest disorderly movement. The success of this boy's labour was so great in one instance, as to induce a countryman to go to the clergyman of the parish, who was the patron of the school, to complain that his children learned so much, and so fast, that as he did not get on at such a rate when he was a child at school, he thought witchcraft alone could produce such an effect upon his children.—